

CLAIMS

1 1. A system for conducting focus group discussions among
2 participants including at least one moderator, at least one
3 client and at least one respondent, wherein said participants are
4 remotely located one from another and are interconnected with
5 each other over a computer network allowing at least electronic
6 data exchange among said participants, said system comprising:

7 a respondent computer interface for a respondent computer,
8 said respondent computer interface for displaying, on a
9 respondent display associated with each respondent computer, a
10 plurality of respondent chat messages generated by said at least
11 one moderator and said at least one respondent, said respondent
12 computer interface for not displaying client chat messages and
13 moderator chat messages and for also allowing each said
14 respondent to input respondent chat messages through said
15 respondent computer interface using at least one respondent
16 computer input device associated with each said respondent
17 computer;

18 a client computer interface for a client computer, said
19 client interface for displaying, on a client display associated
20 with each client computer, said plurality of respondent chat
21 messages generated by said at least one moderator and said at
22 least one respondent, a plurality of client chat messages
23 generated by said at least one client and said at least one
24 moderator, said client computer interface for also allowing said

25 at least one client to input client chat messages through said
26 client computer interface using at least one client input device
27 associated with each said client computer and for preventing said
28 at least one client from entering respondent chat messages; and
29 a moderator computer interface for a moderator computer,
30 said moderator computer interface for displaying, on a client
31 display associated with each moderator computer, said plurality
32 of respondent chat messages and said plurality of client chat
33 messages, said moderator computer interface for also allowing
34 said at least one moderator to input respondent chat messages to
35 be displayed to said at least one respondent and said at least
36 one client, and client chat messages to be displayed to said at
37 least one client through said moderator computer interface using
38 at least one moderator input device associated with each said
39 moderator computer.

1 2. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1, wherein said computer network comprises the
3 Internet World-Wide-Web.

1 3. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1, wherein at least one of said respondent or
3 client chat messages include audio files.

1 4. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1, wherein at least one of said respondent or

3 client chat messages include graphical images.

1 5. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1, wherein at least one of said respondent or
3 client chat messages include video data provided by at least one
4 of said client, respondent and moderator.

1 6. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1, wherein said client computer interface
3 provides at least two display areas arranged on said client
4 computer display, a first of said two display areas for
5 displaying said client chat messages and a second of said two
6 display areas for displaying said respondent chat messages.

1 7. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1, wherein said moderator computer interface
3 provides at least two display areas arranged on said moderator
4 computer display, a first of said two display areas for
5 displaying said client chat messages and a second of said two
6 display areas for displaying said respondent chat messages.

1 8. The system for conducting focus groups as claimed in
2 Claim 7, wherein said moderator computer interface provides a
3 chat message destination selector, for allowing said moderator to
4 select between providing input as a client chat message and a
5 respondent chat message.

1 9. The system for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 1 further comprising a chat message database,
3 for storing said respondent and client chat messages exchanged
4 during a focus group discussion.

1 10. A method for conducting focus group discussions among
2 participants including at least one moderator, at least one
3 client and at least one respondent, wherein said participants are
4 remotely located, one from another, each said at least one
5 respondent having a respondent computer including a respondent
6 computer interface, responsive to respondent chat messages, for
7 displaying, on a respondent computer display device said
8 respondent chat messages, each said at least one client having a
9 client computer including a client computer interface, responsive
10 to said respondent chat messages and client chat messages, for
11 displaying, on a client computer display device said respondent
12 chat messages in a respondent chat display area on said client
13 computer display device, and for displaying said client chat
14 messages in a client chat display area on said client computer
15 display device, and each moderator having a moderator computer
16 including a moderator interface, responsive to said respondent
17 and client chat messages, for displaying, on a moderator computer
18 display device said client chat messages in a client chat display
19 area and for displaying said respondent chat messages in a
20 respondent chat display area on said moderator computer display
21 device, said at least one respondent computer, said at least one
22 client computer and said at least one moderator computer
23 interconnected with each other over a computer network, said
24 method comprising the steps of:

25 accepting and transmitting respondent chat messages provided
26 by said at least one moderator from at least one moderator

27 computer input device;

28 accepting and transmitting respondent chat messages provided
29 by said at least one respondent from at least one respondent
30 computer input device in response to said respondent chat
31 messages transmitted from said at least one moderator;

32 displaying said respondent chat messages on said respondent
33 computer display device and blocking display of client and
34 moderator chat messages by said respondent computer interface;

35 displaying said respondent chat messages in said respondent
36 chat display area on said moderator and client computer display
37 devices by said moderator and client computer interfaces
38 respectively;

39 accepting client chat messages provided by said at least one
40 client from at least one client computer input device and
41 provided by said at least one moderator from at least one
42 moderator computer input device;

43 displaying said client chat messages in said client chat
44 display area on said on said moderator and client computer
45 display devices by said moderator and client computer interfaces;
46 and

47 prohibiting, by said client computer interface, said
48 respondent chat messages from being generated by said at least
49 one client.

1 11. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 10, wherein said respondent, client and

3 moderator computers are interconnected over a computer network
4 comprising the Internet World-Wide-Web.

1 12. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 10, wherein said steps of accepting chat
3 messages comprise accepting text messages from said at least one
4 client, respondent and moderator .

1 13. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 10, wherein said steps of accepting chat
3 messages provided by said at least one client, respondent and
4 moderator comprises accepting graphical images from said at least
5 one client, respondent and moderator.

1 14. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 10, wherein said steps of accepting chat
3 messages provided by said at least one client, respondent and
4 moderator comprises accepting audio files from said at least one
5 client, respondent and moderator.

1 15. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 10, wherein said steps of accepting chat
3 messages provided by said at least one client, respondent and
4 moderator comprises accepting video data provided by said at
5 least one client, respondent and moderator.

1 16. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
2 claimed in Claim 10 further comprising the step of storing said
3 chat messages in a database.

16. The method for conducting focus group discussions as
claimed in Claim 10 further comprising the step of storing said
chat messages in a database.